

VZCZCXRO1027
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3474 3070235
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 020235Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0175
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003474

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I AND NEA/IR
NSC STAFF FOR OLLIVANT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/01/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BASRA LEADERS VOICE QUIET SUPPORT FOR SOFA

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Basra politicians, security officials, and community leaders voiced quiet support for the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) during a visit October 26-29 by Gordon Gray, Senior Advisor for Southern Iraq Affairs. Basrah Governor Mohammed Wa'eli predicted that the SOFA would lead to increased foreign investment in Iraq and predicted that the GOI would approve it, if Iraqi officials could manage to resist Iranian attempts to undermine the agreement. He also noted that the SOFA would provide protection against Iran. Awad al-Abdan, a representative of Saleh al-Mutlagh's National Dialogue Front, expressed philosophical opposition to the SOFA. He conceded at the end of our meeting that most of the party privately supported it as a way to check Iranian influence but said it would not support the SOFA publicly. Moderate Shi'a cleric Abdel al-Moussawi also indicated support for the SOFA and sought reassurance that it would help preserve a unified Iraq. End summary.

¶2. (C) Senior Advisor Gray and emboffs visited Basrah October 26-29 for discussions on the SOFA as well as Iranian influence in Basra, upcoming provincial elections, security improvements, and recent Sadrist activities (septels). Basrah Governor Mohammed Wa'eli volunteered that the SOFA could help bring much-needed foreign investment to Basra. Basrawis understand that they are now weak and need a foreign partner, he said; the SOFA will ensure that partner is the United States and not Iran. Wa'eli predicted that the GOI would approve the SOFA if Iraqi politicians could manage to resist Iranian influence. (Comment: Wa'eli's comments go beyond the Fadilah party line, which is that Iraq needs a SOFA but that this SOFA gives up too much. End comment.)

¶3. (C) Awad al-Abdan of the Sunni-led National Dialogue Front also viewed the SOFA through the prism of Iranian influence. Al-Abdan said he was conveying the message of the party's leader, Saleh al-Mutlaq, that it opposed the SOFA on the principle of opposition to foreign troops in Iraq. But at the same time, the party tends to support anything that Iran opposes, and he conceded that the SOFA would help contain Iranian influence. However, the group will never publicly support it, he said.

¶4. (C) Likewise, Abdul Hassan al-Rashid, representing the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), said that "we hope (the SOFA) is signed." He added that openly supporting the SOFA would "affect our reputation" but that ISCI will still support it in the end. Moderate Shi'a cleric Abdel al-Moussawi was concerned about the effect of the establishment of regions, such as Kurdistan or a regional government in the south, on the SOFA. Assured by Gray that the SOFA was an agreement with the national government and would be enforced nation-wide, he suggested a clause specifying that in the agreement.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Basrawis we met all viewed the SOFA in the context of Iranian attempts to influence the south.

However they might feel about a US military presence in Iraq, they indicated that the SOFA will serve as a deterrent to Iranian meddling. That posture will not result in enthusiastic public endorsements of the SOFA, although one group of sheikhs did reach out to Regional Embassy Office during the visit to offer a public pledge of support. It did suggest at least quiet acquiescence to the SOFA among Basrawis, if the agreement is approved in Baghdad. End comment.

CROCKER